

Testimony on Senate Bill 1061- An Act Concerning Vocational Agriculture Center Funding

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischman and members of the education committee, my name is Lori Tollmann from Lebanon, Connecticut and I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 1061- An Act Concerning Vocational Agriculture Center Funding.

As a parent that has had two children attend the Lebanon Regional Agri-Science Center located at Lyman Memorial High School, I know first hand the benefits of children having an agricultural education. This is something close to our hearts, coming from a farming background. My son who has just graduated has used his knowledge from the agri-science center in his recent job. My daughter, a junior, is the FFA vice president of the Lebanon Regional FFA Chapter which has allowed her to gain leadership experience she wouldn't have gotten if she didn't attend the ag program. She is planning on becoming a veterinarian which will allow her to fully utilize her high school agricultural background. Each of them has grown individually as a person with the leadership qualities they learned in the FFA.

Like any other parent in Connecticut, my family had a choice in where our children went to high school. They had the option of a tech school, a magnet school, a private school, a traditional high school, or the agri-science program. Both of my two children choose to pursue their interests in the field of agriculture. As a parent, I have been extremely supportive of the program due to its many benefits over a more traditional high school setting. These include a work experience in the form of a supervised agricultural experience project, the leadership development experience that they have achieved through the FFA, and the wealth of knowledge they gain daily in the classroom. I know that they would not have had these options if they attended one of their other choices.

You have heard from previous speakers about the state support per student for magnet schools, charters, vo-tech, etc which were the other choices my children had. Currently, the Lebanon Agri-Science Center receives approximately \$700 in funding from the state with the sending town paying a portion of the tuition but it does not cover the full cost of educating a child at Lyman Memorial High School. As a

taxpayer in Lebanon we are subsidizing the education of the students that come from the other 11 surrounding towns that feed into our regional program. While I know the benefit of the program others might not. We are one of the smaller programs in the state at one of the smaller high schools in the state, members of the community should not be subsidizing the education of out of town children. By raising the operating grant you will be reducing the burden on host towns such as mine, and allowing programs to increase enrollment due to the fact that they are not losing money by taking in children that are not fully paid for by the sending town or the state. The Lebanon program is currently choosing which 30 students out of the 49 that applied will be able to come to the program next year. Shouldn't all students that want to pursue a career in agriculture have that option? I believe that by closing the gap in funding that currently exists; our town would be able to grow the program thereby increasing the number of educated young people interested in agriculture in Connecticut and growing our states economy.

I thank you for listening to my testimony and encourage you to vote yes, on Senate Bill 1061, An Act Concerning Vocational Agriculture Center Funding. I would be happy to entertain any questions the committee might have.